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## THE HOME READING COURSES OF THE UNITED STATES BUREAU OF EDUCATION

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The Home Reading Courses of the United States Bureau of Education have been established to meet a well-defined need for systematic reading, not only among those familiar with the classics, but among many who have heretofore not had the opportunity to read good books under helpful direction. Through these courses it is hoped that acquaintance with good literature may be promoted.

The great books of literature are those which represent the ideals and tendencies of the people of whom they are written. They are mirrors in which are reflected the thoughts and feelings and aspirations of a race, an age or a civilization. They live through the centuries because they are taken from life.

All people may read the world's greatest literature with pleasure and profit. In some quarters the impression has prevailed that certain books of literature could not be read without the aid of an instructor or, at least, of an outline. It is a fact that so much instruction has sometimes been given *about* these great books, that a distaste *for* the books has been created in the readers' minds.

Schools have the best opportunity to create in boys and girls a desire for reading and to teach them to discriminate between good and bad literature. They set the standard. Teachers may so establish the reading habit that boys and girls who leave school at an early age will be satisfied with nothing less than the best literature and will supplement their school work by much reading in after life. More concentrated reading may be done in the home than in the school, where the attention is distracted by recitations and the confusion incident to school-room life.

Thousands of boys and girls are leaving school yearly before they have finished the grammar grades. Thousands of men and women testify to their need of further education. To meet this need the United States Commissioner of Education, Dr. P. P. Claxton, has inaugurated the National Reading Circle.

The plan already includes ten reading courses as follows:

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| 1. Great Literary Bibles.                  | 6. Thirty Books of Great Fiction. |
| 2. Masterpieces of the World's Literature. | 7. The World's Heroes.            |
| 3. Reading Course for Parents.             | 8. American Literature.           |
| 4. Miscellaneous Course for Boys.          | 9. History.                       |
| 5. Miscellaneous Course for Girls.         | 10. Biography.                    |

Seven courses are now ready for distribution. Courses seven, nine and ten are in preparation at present.

The first two courses include such books as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, the *Aeneid* of Virgil and the *Nibelungenlied*. Among the books chosen for parents' reading are a few relating to the physical care of children, their moral and spiritual training and a few books on domestic economy and recent fiction.

The preparation of some of the courses has been in the hands of a committee composed of Professor William Lyon Phelps of Yale University, Professor Charles Alphonso Smith of the University of Virginia, Professor Charles Forster Smith of the University of Wisconsin and Professor Richard Burton of the University of Minnesota.

A course in United States history is now in preparation. The committee working on this course in coöperation with the Bureau of Education consists of Professor William Starr Myers of Princeton University, Professor Wilbur F. Gordy of Hartford, Conn., Professor Franklin L. Riley of the Washington and Lee University and Professor William H. Mace of Syracuse University.

Over three thousand men, women, boys and girls have enrolled in the National Reading Circle and are reading the books selected for the courses. The readers represent all walks of life—school principals, teachers, students, business men and women, physicians, lawyers, ministers, librarians. School principals, teachers and librarians are assisting by forming small circles for reading. Housewives are forming reading circles among their neighbors.

The requirements are simple. Each reader is asked to send to the Bureau of Education a notification when each book is begun and finished, and to send a summary of every book read. All courses are to be read once, at least, except the first course which is to be read twice.

When a course is completed, test questions are sent to the

reader. When these are answered satisfactorily, a certificate, signed by the Commissioner of Education, is given.

State library commissions and traveling library commissions are giving their aid, placing the books at the disposal of the readers. Local libraries are coöperating by placing the books in the courses on the shelves. Library officials in all parts of the country report that the demand for serious books of this sort has never been so insistent as at the present time.

Upon application to the Home Education Division, U. S. Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C., full information and the reading courses will be sent.

It is difficult to measure the full extent of this new work. In addition to the large number of persons already on the rolls of the bureau who are taking the courses regularly, there are many others who have been stimulated directly or indirectly by the bureau's efforts to give national attention to the importance of better reading. In this respect the reading courses are but one of a number of evidences of the federal government's newly awakened interest in the long-neglected field of home education.